



# StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit (K-12) FAQs

LAST UPDATED JUNE 16, 2020

## **I have specific questions about my child and my school. Where can I find more information on how my school will take action on the public health guidance provided by NCDHHS?**

Every child and every school is unique. NCDHHS issued statewide public health guidance through the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit \(K-12\)](#). NCDPI has since issued ongoing operational guidance, [Lighting Our Way Forward](#), as a reference for schools to support their implementation of the public health requirements and recommendations. School districts and schools are building their own plans in response to the requirements and recommendations set forth in the StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit and the DPI operational guidance in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our public schools.

Contact your school to find out more information on how they are planning to reopen their facilities to students and staff.

## **Are cloth face coverings required for North Carolina's students and school staff when school buildings reopen?**

See page 5 of the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit](#) for the statewide requirements and recommendations.

Wearing cloth face masks is strongly encouraged for both students and teachers but not required as part of NCDHHS's guidance. However, some counties may have orders in place requiring cloth face coverings. Students, families, and staff should consult local restrictions as they plan for the new school year.

NCDHHS strongly recommends that face coverings be worn by staff and students (particularly older students) if feasible, and are most essential at times when physical distancing is difficult.

Cloth face coverings should not be placed on:

- Anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious.
- Anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the face covering without assistance.
- Anyone who cannot tolerate a cloth face covering due to developmental, medical or behavioral health needs.
- Any child under the age of 2

Schools are required to share information on the proper use of cloth face coverings so students, families, and staff can make the best decisions for themselves, but they are not required to be worn. Please see more details below about the requirements and recommendations on cloth face coverings, and if you are looking for more detailed information on cloth face coverings, it might be helpful to look at the [detailed guidance provided by the CDC](#).

## Do preschool programs have to adhere to the requirements listed in the StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit (K-12)?

We know that preschool programs can get lost in the mix when there are requirements issued that may be more aligned to older children rather than four year olds, and we wanted to prevent any confusion in the release of this guidance regarding what public health requirements those preschool programs located in public schools should follow.

[The memorandum linked here](#) was issued on June 8th, 2020 jointly between the NC Department of Health and Human Services and the NC Department of Public Instruction. It states that preschool programs located in public schools, including NC Pre-K, EC, Title 1, and Head Start, should follow the [Interim Guidance for Child Care Settings](#), last updated today, June 9th. While similar to the just-released K - 12 public health guidance, the child care guidance is better suited for early learning.

However, the memo notes that preschool programs located in public schools may be asked to take additional precautions on their campus, such as social distancing in the cafeteria. Normally we would not ask young children to keep 6 feet apart from each other - however, if possible, preschool programs should follow campus-wide health protocols if asked to do so, especially in shared settings like hallways and the cafeteria. Students, families, and staff should consult local restrictions as they plan for the new school year.

## Will there be a Spanish version of the Toolkit?

Yes – it is important that families of our students know what to expect when their children return to school. You will find a Spanish version of the toolkit very soon. Check back regularly on the [NCDHHS guidance page](#) under Schools for additional translated documents.

## Which operational plan will my child's school operate under?

See pages 2 and 13 of the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit](#) for more information on Plans A, B, and C, and the process for determining them.

By July 1, 2020, the Governor's Office and NCDHHS, in consultation with NCSBE and NCDPI, will determine how schools can reopen safely for the 2020-21 school year based on the state's COVID-19 metrics. Future decisions to increase or ease restrictions will be made if the state's or a region's COVID-19 metrics worsen or improve. School districts may choose to implement a more restrictive plan but may not choose to implement a less restrictive plan than determined by NCDHHS, NCSBE, and NCDPI.

You should contact your child's school to learn more about the operational plans your campus is planning.

## What is required for COVID-19 screening and monitoring symptoms among students and staff at schools?

See page 7 of the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit](#) for the statewide requirements and recommendations.

Any student, staff member, or any other person entering a school facility, such as a school building or a transportation vehicle, must be screened for COVID-19 symptoms and have their temperature checked. For students boarding school transportation on the way to school, a school may institute a parent/guardian attestation form that states their child does not have COVID-19 symptoms. However, this student must be screened for COVID-19 symptoms and have their temperature checked prior to entering the school building.

## Plan B requires ensuring social distancing in school facilities by limiting to 50% maximum capacity. What does "maximum capacity" refer to?

See pages 2 and 13 of the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit](#) for more information on Plans A, B, and C, and the process for determining them.

Under a Plan B scenario, schools would be required to limit density of people in school facilities and transportation vehicles to no greater than 50% maximum occupancy to ensure social distancing of at least 6 feet apart between people. For school facilities, "maximum occupancy" refers to the stated fire capacity of the building, or 12 per 1,000

square feet if there is not a fire code number readily available. This definition is aligned to the density limitations in the May 22<sup>nd</sup> interim health guidance for restaurants, [linked here](#).

## How should North Carolina schools support the health and wellbeing of students and staff who might be at high-risk for severe illness due to COVID-19 as they plan for reopening?

See page 5 of the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit](#) for the statewide requirements and recommendations.

Protecting vulnerable populations is critical to support the health and safety of our students, their families, and our staff across North Carolina's public schools. You should connect directly with your school for support as they finalize their plans for returning to school buildings.

Individuals who are considered high-risk for severe illness due to COVID-19 include people who:

- Are 65 years of age or older
- Have a high-risk condition that includes:
  - chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
  - heart disease with complications
  - compromised immune system
  - severe obesity
  - body mass index of 40 or higher
  - other underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, such as diabetes, renal failure or liver disease

If you are interested in more information on who is at higher risk for severe illness due to COVID-19, please take a look at these links available from the [CDC](#) and [NCDHHS](#).

You should also view the [operational guidance](#) provided by the Department of Public Instruction with resources for how schools can take these requirements and implement them on their campuses.

## Do the requirements in the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit \(K-12\)](#) apply to private schools?

These requirements apply only to public schools across North Carolina. We hope they serve as a set of guidelines for nonpublic schools to help minimize the risk of COVID-19 exposure and spread, but they are not requirements for them.

## How will we keep schools clean enough to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 exposure and spread?

See page 6 of the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit](#) for the statewide requirements and recommendations.

The [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit \(K-12\)](#) lays out a comprehensive set of health practices that public schools must follow to minimize risk of exposure to COVID-19 for students, staff, and families. The Toolkit outlines actions that schools must take to minimize spread of COVID-19 while allowing in-person teaching to resume, such as social distancing requirements, screening protocols for COVID-19 symptoms, and thorough cleaning and hygiene routines.

Schools are required to take the following actions, among many more:

- Provide adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors (e.g., soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol for safe use by staff and older children, paper towels, and tissues).
- Teach and reinforce handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and/or the safe use of hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol by staff and older children.
- Provide hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) at every building entrance and exit, in the cafeteria, and in every classroom, for safe use by staff and older students.

- Establish a schedule for and perform ongoing and routine environmental cleaning and disinfection of high-touch areas, such as faucet handles, EPA approved disinfectant
- Limit sharing of personal items and supplies

The NC Department of Health and Human Services is asking people to remember these three things as we stay strong and continue to flatten the curve and slow the spread of COVID-19: Wear, Wait, Wash. Wear a cloth face covering if you will be with other people. Wait 6 feet apart and avoid close contact. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer. These actions can protect our families and neighbors as the state takes a cautious step forward to ease restrictions while the virus is still circulating.

You should also view the [operational guidance](#) provided by the Department of Public Instruction with resources for how schools can take these requirements and implement them on their campuses.

### **My company manufactures PPE and/or infection control materials, such as cloth face coverings. How can I be considered as a vendor for the state?**

North Carolina needs companies and manufacturers that can produce and provide critical supplies to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please complete the form below. All required fields must be completed in order to be considered for a procurement.

<https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/procurement-form>